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STATE OF MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

September 20, 2001

Carol Hanlon
U.S. Department of Energy
Yucca Mountain Site Characterization Office
(M/S #025)
P.O. Box 30307
North Las Vegas, Nevada 89036-0307

RE: Possible Site Recommendations for Yucca Mountain

Dear Ms. Hanlon:

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) is providing these Comments in response to the August 21, 2001 Federal Register Notice regarding the Yucca Mountain Preliminary Site Suitability Evaluation (PSSE). MPUC is pleased that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has reached the milestone of releasing the PSSE and that DOE is inviting public comment.

In general, the MPUC concludes that DOE, after 20 years of exhaustive study, has obtained sufficient scientific information to make a sound judgement on the Yucca Mountain project. While MPUC lacks the scientific expertise to evaluate the PSSE, MPUC concludes that, if the Secretary determines that the scientific analysis indicates that the Yucca Mountain site is likely to meet the applicable radiation protection standards established by the Environmental Protection Agency and Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Secretary should recommend to the President that the Yucca Mountain project proceed.


The MPUC believes such a recommendation is critically important to Minnesota. DOE has a legal obligation to begin accepting the waste and any unnecessary delay would merely increase the cost of nuclear storage. To date, Minnesota ratepayers have paid more than \$333.6 million to DOE to fund DOE's mandate. It is expected that taxpayers will bear a greater cost of DOE's delays due to the July 31, 2001 ruling by the United States Court of Federal Claims that granted Northern States Power Company's motion for summary judgment on liability against DOE. In addition, a sensible resolution of the spent fuel situation is essential to preserving system reliability in Minnesota and the Upper Great Plains region. This is due to the fact that the 1994 Minnesota Legislature authorized a spent fuel storage facility which will allow continued operation of Xcel's Prairie Island generation station until 2007. This authorization was premised on the notion that DOE would be in a position to accept spent fuel before that time. Obviously, the Minnesota Legislature will once again need to act even if the Yucca Mountain site is approved. However, failure to approve the site and move forward with the facility undoubtedly will force closure of the Prairie Island plant. Loss of Prairie Island, which accounts for 20 percent of Minnesota's electric energy base-load supply, would be a severe blow to system reliability in Minnesota and our region. There is little doubt that enhancing electric system reliability must be a top priority for our State and the Nation.

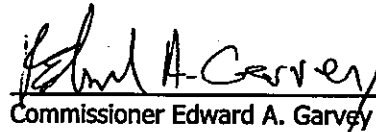
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For these reasons, it is vital to address the issue of nuclear waste in a timely manner, especially if a new dialogue on power production results in a greater role for nuclear energy. While the issues involved with disposal of nuclear waste are complex for a number of reasons, it is critical to develop viable, long-term solutions to the treatment and disposal of nuclear waste.

Sincerely,


Commissioner Gregory Scott, Chair


Commissioner Edward A. Garvey


Commissioner Marshall Johnson

 
Commissioner Veroy Koppendray Commissioner Phyllis A. Reha

c: Joe Bagnoli, Policy Manager, State of Minnesota, Office of Governor Jesse Ventura